THE OUTPOST

U.S. ARMY YUMA PROVING GROUND, YUMA, ARIZONA 85365 | VOLUME 67 NO. 14 JULY 10, 2017

YPG commander helps kick-off Independence Day in Yuma

By Chuck Wullenjohn

Independence Day typically concludes with spectacular, colorful fireworks displays that streak across the dark desert sky, always causing oohs and ahs.

In Yuma, the day has been kicked-off the past 31 years with an upbeat early-morning flag-raising ceremony at Yuma's Armed Forces Park in downtown Yuma. Soldiers and Marines are honored at the ceremony, a speaker provides patriotic remarks and crowds numbering well over 125 gather each year.

Col. Ross Poppenberger, YPG commander, served at the proving ground little more than two weeks before the 2017 event, and, when asked to provide keynote remarks, his response was immediate – "I'd be happy to." He made this decision because of his commitment to becoming involved in the Yuma community.

YPG Commander Col. Ross Poppenberger provides keynote remarks at Yuma's annual Independence Day flag-raising ceremony, centering on introducing himself to the community, discussing the 100 year anniversary of America entering World War I, and explaining the importance of the holiday. "Over the years, I've done a lot of reading about great leaders of the past and of defining moments in history that shaped our sense of who we are as Americans," he said. "Today, Independence Day, is the celebration of probably the biggest defining moment I know of." (Photo by Mark Schauer)

"YPG plays a huge economic role in the area and nearly the entire workforce lives in Yuma," he said, "so it's important that people know what we do. I want to get to know them and for them to know me.

Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Prosser accompanied Poppenberger to the event, which he felt was an excellent testament to the community. "Yuma once again showed its commitment to supporting our men and women in the armed forces," he said.

The ceremony was emceed

SEE **INDEPENDENCE DAY** page 11

New commander believes in teamwork and readiness

By Chuck Wullenjohn

Having spent his early years in Minnesota, Col. Ross Poppenberger moved with his family to Flagstaff, Az., in his pre-teens where he completed junior high, high school and moved on to Arizona State University. He grew to love the state and considers it his home today.

Arizona is listed on his military records as his home state, many members of his family reside here and, by coming to YPG, he says it feels as if he has returned home.

"I can tell you unequivocally," he said, "Arizona – and Yuma – is exactly where I want to be. The stars truly aligned in giving me the opportunity to serve here."

SEE **COMMANDER** page 5

YPG awarded for ambitious public tour schedule

By Chuck Wullenjohn

It's a satisfying feeling to arrange a detailed tour itinerary that works well. But what if that single tour morphs into a long-term series of winter tours with dozens of attendees each time?

Consistent quality is an absolute must, a feature for which YPG was recently recognized by the Yuma Visitors Bureau.

YPG began partnering with the visitors bureau four years ago, offering three winter tours that first year. All seats were spoken for in less than seven days. The next year, tickets sold out in less than seven hours.

During the winter of 2016/2017 the number of YPG tours had grown to ten. A full busload of 50 people took part each time. A line of people leading out the door greeted visitors bureau personnel the morning tickets became available.

Coordinated by the YPG Public Affairs Office, two types of tours are offered. The first is called the "Behind the Big Guns" tour and the second is a slimmed-down version called the "YPG at Ease" tour. Both include a 30 minute YPG briefing and visits to the Heritage Center and Cactus Café. The Behind the Big Guns tour also includes visits to two test sites where attendees get a close-up look at some of the work that takes place at the proving ground.

The award was presented to YPG representatives Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Prosser, Security Specialist Samantha Tamp, Marketing Specialist Teri Womack, former YPG commander Col. Robert Filbey (ret.), Linda Morgan, executive director of the Yuma Visitors Bureau, and Public Affairs Officer Chuck Wullenjohn. Full time Yuma resident Filbey narrates tours as attendees travel to and from YPG by bus. (Photo by Anna Chaulk)

"YPG has offered these tours for years and the response has been extremely positive," said Linda Morgan, executive director of the Yuma Visitors Bureau. "People are bowled over by the importance of YPG to our nation's security."

According to Morgan, the purpose of the tours was to enhance visitor awareness of YPG, its critical present-day mission, and introduce them to the proving ground's fascinating history and the Army's history in Yuma that extends back to 1850. An additional objective was to boost attendance at the YPG Heritage Center museum.

The exact number of tours offered each year has always been limited by military necessity, security concerns and the fact that YPG's military mission takes precedence over tourism. Each visitor undergoes thorough security vetting in advance. However, even though each individual tour sells out, many visitors who miss out on the organized tours visit the Heritage Center on their own.

Morgan believes that the partnership established between YPG and the visitors bureau works smoothly and has grown. She says she has never heard a complaint regarding a YPG tour and feels visitors feel quite appreciative as they depart at the end of each tour.

"I think they actually feel humbled by the vast quantity of work that goes on at YPG," she said. "They generally only know bits and pieces of information about the proving ground when they arrive, so receiving a complete picture is mind boggling."

In recognition of what YPG has accomplished, the Yuma Visitors Bureau presented the proving ground with the 2017 "Egret" award in recognition of YPG's efforts in sponsoring the public tours. The egret is the official mascot of the visitors bureau and, in terms of the award, it stands for "Expression of Gratitude in Recognition of Efforts for Tourism."

The award recognizes a partner that goes above and beyond normal effort to make a program work, with only one award presented each year. The award ceremony took place at the bureau's annual meeting in late June.

"We believe the YPG tours were a "win-win" for two partners who came together from very different places," explained Morgan. "Together we created a tangible and popular marketing product, and YPG has a great opportunity to promote the important work it performs."

"Yuma Proving Ground has truly been a great partner."

The proving ground has also been nominated by the visitors bureau for the Governor's Tourism Award for Outstanding Tourism Partnership in a rural area of Arizona. The winner will be announced later this summer.

THE OUTPOST

The Outpost is an unofficial publication authorized under provisions of AR 360–1. The Outpost is published every two weeks by the Public Affairs Office, Yuma Proving Ground. Views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Army. This newspaper uses material credited to ATEC and ARNEWS. While contributions are solicited, the PAO reserves the right to edit all submitted materials and make corrections, changes or deletions to conform with the policy of this newspaper.

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M1 tanks have a long history at YPG

By David J. Horn

Each day on our drive out to YPG on Highway 95, we pass by an old M60 Tank parked out in front of VFW Post 8242. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the M60 was the Army's main battle tank. Although the M60 incorporated a lot of improvements during its time on the front lines, by the early 1970s, the Army started working on the design of a new tank that would be more maneuverable, provide better protection to the crew, and be fitted with a larger main gun.

The result of that effort was the M1 Abrams Tank. Prototypes of this new vehicle called the "XM1" were developed in the early 1970s by Chrysler and General Motors, where the Chrysler prototype incorporated a turbine engine, and the General Motors prototype had a diesel engine. After a long series of tests, the DoD selected the Chrysler tank with the turbine engine.

After additional testing in the late 1970s, the XM1 went into service as the M1 Abrams in 1980. In 1982, Chrysler Defense was sold to General Dynamics Land Systems Division (GDLS), the company that still manages the design today.

Two particular problem areas that followed the tank into production included problems with the air cleaner, and the short life of the tracks, particularly when the vehicle was operated in a desert environment. The efforts to evaluate improvements to redesigned air filtration systems and new track designs was what initially brought the M1 to YPG for testing in the early 1980s. Due to the success of those early testing efforts and the importance of evaluating M1s in the desert environment, M1 tanks have been tested at YPG ever since.

Yuma Proving Ground's Ground Combat Systems Branch puts military vehicles through a grueling reliability and performance regimen in desert terrain. When not racing across scores of miles of hot, treacherous desert road courses, vehicles like this M1 Abrams are put through other stresses, such as climbing this awing 60% grade. In comparison, the steepest grade on an American interstate highway is 6%. (Photo by Mark Schauer)

There are three types of tests conducted on the M1 tanks at YPG, including tests of tanks off the assembly (or vehicle refurbishment) lines, tanks that are rolling test beds with dozens of new parts under test all at the same time, and tests where one major new component is under evaluation. That's the way it was back in the early1980s, and that's still the way it still is today.

In addition to the development work on the vehicle, there are also times where YPG has supported the tank crews during times of war. During the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1991, YPG test personnel worked 24-hours a day for months, conducting tests to ensure that when the ground war broke out, the M1 tanks and the tactics the crews used during the fighting, were the best that they could be. YPG provided similar support during the early days of the Global War on Terror.

But what's not the same after almost 40 years, is the actual vehicle. While today's M1A2 SEP v3 tank looks similar to the original M1, they are as different as a 1965 Ford Mustang is to the new 2017 model. It's a lot more capable, and a lot more complicated.

The folks here at YPG that test the M1 today are a team within the staff of the Combat Systems Branch, Combat and Automotive Division. There are currently 4 test directors managing three major tests, involving six vehicles. Current programs include tanks that are undergoing tests on the latest vehicle electronics, radios and software, and also engine improvements, new tracks and road wheels, new batteries, new cooling system improvements, and new protective systems.

So next time you are driving around YPG, and you get a glimpse of that massive vehicle powering across the desert sand, remind yourself of the important role that the M1 Abrams Tank plays in the defense of our nation, and take pride in the part that Yuma Proving Ground has contributed to that effort.

Shoot'in the Breeze

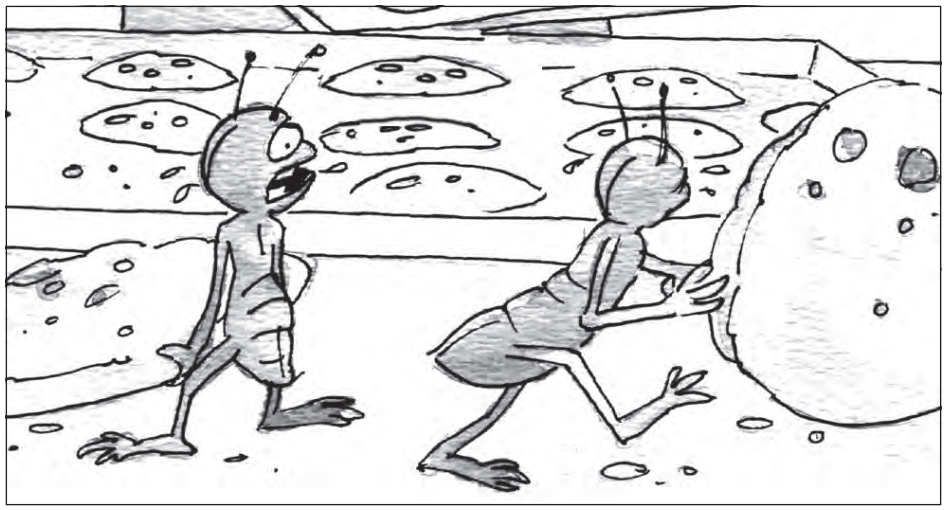
Don't get bugged

By David J. Horn

The other day, one of the test officers came into our building all excited, then described how one of those little white lizards had almost followed them in through the door. I'm not sure whether the lizard was trying to get out of the 110-degree heat, or it came looking for some crickets to have for lunch.

When I first came here to YPG, like most people from up north, I came at least expecting to have to deal with the multitudes of rattle snakes, tarantulas, and scorpions I had heard so much about. But what caught me off guard, were the desert crickets and those awe-inspiring water bugs.

Up north, I actually didn't mind sharing the outdoors with those



black crickets that they have up there. Their slow, rhythmic chirps seemed such a part of nature's summer nights, as you sat around a campfire looking up at the stars and such.

But, the crickets here in the desert are like none I have ever run into before. Fingernails on chalkboards or yapping little poodles have nothing on these guys, with their shrill, high-pitched chirps…that go right to the sensitive parts of my nervous system and quite simply drive me nuts. Within a day or two of moving into our first Yuma apartment, my wife at the time and I had ripped off most of the interior molding around the doors and windows as part of a desperate chemical counter-attack in a battle that we still ended up losing.

About the time I started wondering if I would ever have a peaceful night's sleep again, one morning my wife says, "Honey, take a look at these! Do you think we have mice?" There they were, laying right up there on our kitchen countertop.

So, we went to the hardware store, bought a couple of mouse traps, baited them with peanut butter, and spent the next couple of days wondering why we weren't catching anything.

I did not take long, for the inevitable to happen. My wife let out the loudest scream I've ever heard, as they-- meaning her and this huge "mutant-escapee-from-a-science-experiment-gone-bad"-- had just met in our bathroom. I grabbed a flyswatter and hit it. It grabbed the swatter and hit me back.

After about five chaotic minutes and two bent-up flyswatters, I finally managed to pummel the thing down. I remember just staring at the carcass in somber silence, wondering if and when its parents were going to come around looking for it, and just what else was going to crawl up out of that drain.

Anyway, after years of living in the desert, most of the surprises are behind me now. Thanks to a little professional exterminating help, all I hear around the house now on these hot Yuma summer nights as I sit out by the pool looking up at the stars, are the sounds of all the neighborhood A/C units pounding away, and the neighbor's stupid little yapping poodle.

Well, enough writing for the moment, as it is time to get back to more immediate priorities. Something awfully big just ran under my desk.

Next Outpost deadline is noon *July 27th*

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COMMANDER

FROM PAGE 1

Officers of his rank are provided a "dream sheet" prior to entering a new assignment where they are offered the opportunity to make choices from various selections. The command of Yuma Proving Ground was one of the 25 selections on Poppenberger's dream sheet, and it immediately became his number one choice.

"Who ends up getting their first choice?" he said with a laugh. "Well, I did, and I'm ecstatic about it."

Poppenberger began his military career in 1989 when he enlisted in the Arizona National Guard as an artilleryman. Commissioned as an officer after graduating from college, he has served in a number of places and variety of positions, including ten years as a project manager, and combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. His last assignment was with the Missile Defense Agency at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama.

As proving ground commander, he is responsible literally for everything that does or doesn't happen at YPG. It's a daunting responsibility he takes seriously, but he is fortunate in the team around him.

New YPG commander Col. Ross Poppenberger first visited YPG as a project manager four years ago, when he came for testing of an air cargo delivery system. "I've heard YPG testing being praised in circles throughout the Army Acquisition Corps for years," he said. "I can tell you unequivocally, Arizona – and Yuma – is exactly where I want to be." (Photos by Mark Schauer)

"The reputation of YPG for excellence long predates me," he said. "I've heard YPG testing being praised in circles throughout the Army Acquisition Corps for years. My mission is to continue to build on the legacy of the past."

Poppenberger feels the managers and leaders at YPG are doing a good job and does not see any need for micro-managing or interfering with details of what they do on his part. He feels YPG personnel work here because they "want" to, rather than "have" to. He has been deeply impressed with the dedication he has seen.

"Of course, there will always be accountability for accomplishing YPG's daily mission and providing quality test data, but I intend to focus on making sure we are well positioned to meet future testing challenges," he said. "Plus, I want to become fully involved with the Yuma community."

Though Poppenberger spent a week at YPG this past April in which he conducted a whirlwind tour of the proving ground and met hundreds of people, it did little more than whet his appetite.

"YPG has excellent facilities, large ranges, excellent customer service, and great customer rates," he said, "and I got a first-hand glimpse at that time. It made me want to come out here even more."

Poppenberger first visited YPG as a project manager four years ago when he came for testing of an air cargo delivery system. A number of other tests of the same system occurred, and he was involved with each, but as a far-away manager.

The Army Chief of Staff has frequently spoken about the importance of military readiness across the Army, and it's a concept Poppenberger has taken to heart.

"This is the real deal," he said. "Now is the time to prepare for the future --to invest in it, to configure ourselves properly, to prepare to conduct testing on items that don't even exist yet."

Col. Ross Poppenberger talks with former YPG Commander Robert Filbey (left) and his wife, Nancy Filbey, after Yuma's annual Independence Day flag-raising ceremony. Poppenberger provided keynote remarks at the event.

This is a daunting challenge, but he says it can be accomplished by being connected with product managers, conducting thoughtful research, remaining aware, working with the outside community, and making good decisions. The goal, he says, is for YPG to conduct quality testing that will lead to equipment and munitions that give our Soldiers a decisive advantage over any enemy.

On a personal level, Poppenberger considers himself a "morning" person who is a big believer in the "team" concept. He doesn't like to see apathy in others, people not performing up to their capabilities, or seeing or doing things that are a waste of time.

He believes that mistakes happen and that the best way to handle them is simply to own up and fix the situation. "Bad news does not get better with time," he said.

Regarding what he likes doing during off-hours, Poppenberger enjoys getting outdoors to camp, bicycle, hunt, and ski. "I like both hockey and rodeos, which kind of explains the Minnesota-Arizona connection," he said with a laugh.

Throughout his 28 year military career, Poppenberger has used Army equipment and munitions that proved its worthiness at the three YPG test centers – Yuma Test Center, Cold Regions Test Center and Tropic Regions Test Center.

"YPG testing has helped ensure that our Army is the best and most capable in the world," he said. "It is an honor for me to serve with an outstanding workforce that has, and will continue, to accomplish the daily mission and build for the future."

Aquila's successful second flight: Another step forward in bringing the world closer together

By Martin Luis Gomez

Just after dawn on May 22, Facebook reached another exciting and important milestone for the Aquila program — completing the successful second full-scale test flight of the aircraft. The aircraft flew for one hour and 46 minutes, and landed perfectly on our prepared landing site.

In order to launch right after sunrise, which was at 5:15 a.m., we showed up at the gate to Yuma Proving Ground at 12:30 a.m. While some members of the team began to open the hangar and lift the airplane onto its takeoff dolly, the rest of us prepared the ground control station and engineering station. And pretty much everybody studied the wind forecast.

Aquila's second test flight took into account the lessons we learned from our first flight. In advance of the second flight, we incorporated a number of modifications to Aquila, including:

•Adding "spoilers" to the wings, which help to increase drag and reduce lift during the landing approach

•Incorporating hundreds of sensors to gather new data

•Modifying the autopilot software

•Integrating new radios for the communication subsystem

•Applying a smoother finish on the plane

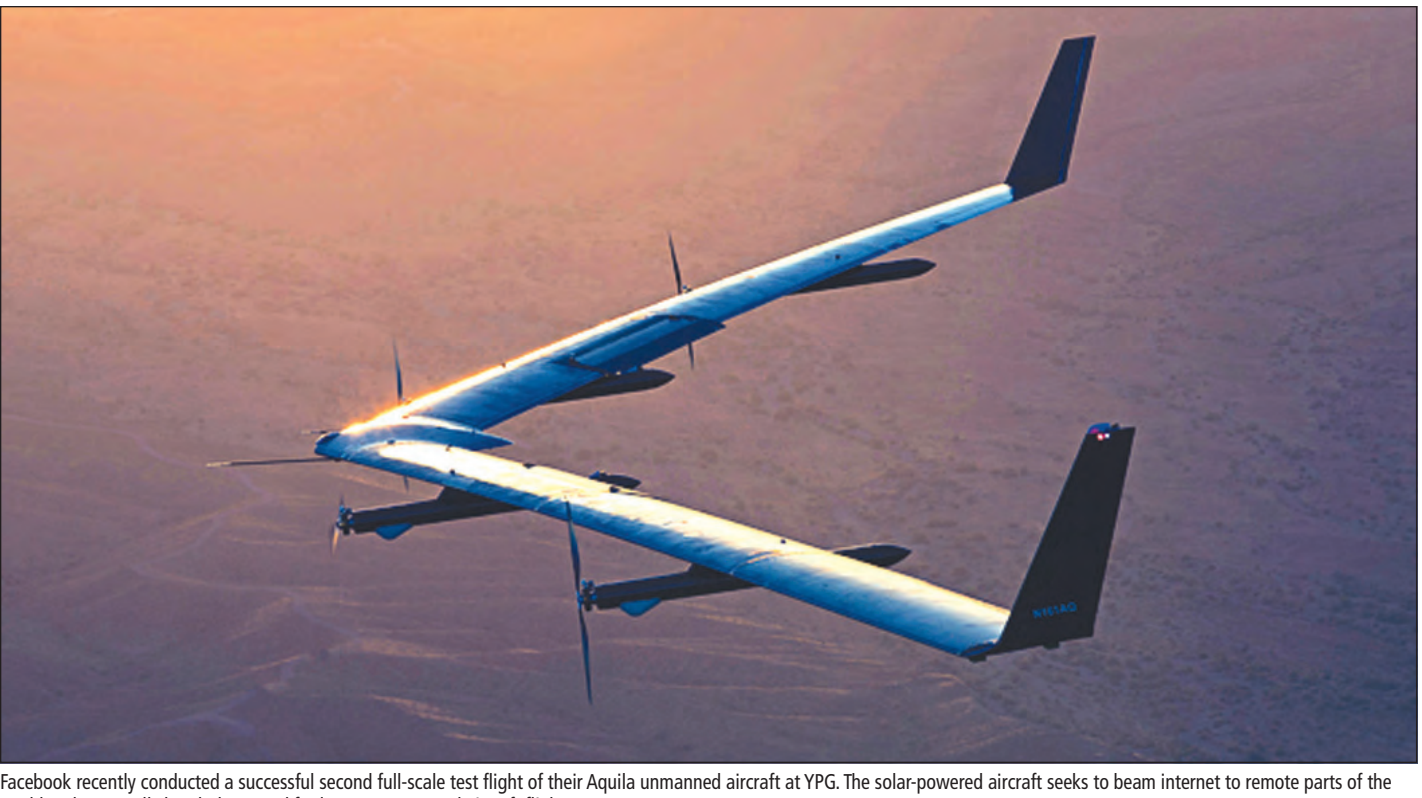
•Installing a horizontal propeller stopping mechanism to support a successful landing

At 5:27 a.m., the sun was just above the horizon, and the aircraft had passed all our preflight checks. The radio links (redundant uplinks and downlinks are installed both for extra bandwidth and for redundancy) were functional, the control surfaces and spoilers were free and correct, and all four motors responded to commands properly.

After completing our pre-takeoff checklist, our brief wait was rewarded with low measured winds as well as low forecast winds. A quick poll of the pilots and engineers resulted in a "go for launch" call. The launch speed was calculated at 27 mph and this was passed to the operators of the tow vehicle. The crew closely watched the displays, awaiting the signals that the autopilot had commanded release and that the airplane was climbing away from the dolly.

Takeoff was normal. It also quickly became apparent that all the systems were functioning normally: The motor current, the airspeed tracking, the heading tracking, the radio links, and the differential GPS all showed nominal behavior. The only surprise was a happy one: The climb rate – at 180 ft/min - was nearly twice as fast as on our first flight. We attribute this to the numerous refinements to Aquila — especially a smoother finish — that were based on learnings from our first flight.

We continued the climb to 3,000 feet, looking for signs of a healthy aircraft before the plane got above our planned flight envelope. With all telemetry "in the green," we continued the climb. By design, Aquila does nothing fast: It climbs slowly, descends even slower, and when flying upwind moves only at 10-15 mph over the ground. We designed Aquila this way because it is meant to stay in the same area for long periods of time to supply internet access. Aquila is solar-powered and extremely power-efficient —- running on the power equivalent of three blow dryers.



Facebook recently conducted a successful second full-scale test flight of their Aquila unmanned aircraft at YPG. The solar-powered aircraft seeks to beam internet to remote parts of the world and eventually break the record for longest unmanned aircraft flight.

This second flight was all about data. We flew lengthy test points at constant speed, heading, and altitude to measure the airplane's drag. The data from these "trim shots," as they're called, will be used to refine our aerodynamic models, which help us predict the energy usage and thus optimize for battery and solar array size. We also undertook extensive instrumentation of the airplane's structure, adding hundreds of sensors to the aircraft to understand how Aquila's shape responds to flight in real-time. These included hundreds of strain gauges and three-axis inertial measurement units (IMUs.) These tools serve to verify and refine our structural model, which predicts both the static shape of the airplane — designed to be very flexible to respond to wind gusts and maneuvers.

Throughout the flight, we also

The Aquila UAS will carry a communications payload that will use lasers to transfer data more than 10 times faster than existing systems. It will be able to aim its beams precisely enough to hit a dime more than 11 miles away while in motion.

continued to verify the drag created by new "spoilers" that we added to Aquila at various angles. Spoilers are movable surfaces on the wing of an aircraft that help create drag to reduce speed and decrease lift. We also tested the two radio links' signal strength from various aspect angles.

After testing the landing algorithm with an elevated landing, we committed the airplane to a complete, successful landing on the designated site.

The Aquila aircraft has no landing gear in the traditional sense. It lands on Kevlar pads bonded to the bottom of the motor pods. The rationale is twofold: 1) We land at very low groundspeed and descent rates, so we can save the weight and drag of struts and wheels, and 2) much of the aircraft's mass is concentrated in the motor pods, since this is where the batteries are installed; once the batteries land, stopping the descent of the rest of the aircraft imposes little load on the structure.

For the landing pad, we created a 500 foot circle of level gravel, about six inches deep and with the consistency of rough sand. Aquila flies autonomously, with the exception of manual interventions in cases such as lining up with the wind. Therefore, shortly before landing, the flight crew uploads a landing plan based on the wind direction such that the airplane lands upwind, thus respecting the crosswind limit.

When landing, the Aquila aircraft follows a three degree path — the glideslope — that starts a few hundred feet in the air and ends on the ground. A feature of this class of airplane is low drag — it's the only way to fly on the limited power sunlight can provide. But while drag is the archenemy of flight, it is the staunch ally of landing. The spoilers that we added to the aircraft are controlled by the autopilot. When the autopilot senses that the aircraft is above the glideslope, it opens the spoilers more, and when it senses that the aircraft is below the glideslope, it closes them. Meanwhile, as it does throughout the flight, the autopilot lowers or raises the nose using elevons, which help to increase or decrease airspeed.

A few seconds before landing, the autopilot stopped the propellers as planned in order to lock them horizontally. The propellers are meant to lock in the horizontal position to avoid damaging them when touching down. In this flight, the motors all stopped, but only one propeller locked horizontally. The aircraft settled onto the landing surface very gently and came to a stop in about 10 meters. It was absolutely perfect. Similar to driving a car on a gravel surface, landing a plane on gravel causes a few minor, easily-repairable dings, but otherwise, Aquila landed in great shape.

From our nearby engineering station, our Aquila team watched a video stream displaying the air-to-air view from our chase helicopter. We had a ringside seat as the aircraft smoothly slid to a stop in a cloud of dust — and the engineering station erupted in cheers. After Aquila's landing, the staff at YPG informally christened this landing area "Aquila Beach" — a name that the entire team was proud to adopt!

Needless to say, the entire team was thrilled with these results.

Connecting people through high-altitude solar-powered aircraft is an audacious goal, but milestones like this flight make the months of hard work worth it. And what is particularly gratifying is that the improvements we implemented based on Aquila's performance during its first test flight made a significant difference in this flight. In the coming months, we're excited to take the lessons from our successful second flight to continue the Aquila program's progress to help bring the world closer together through connectivity.

By design, Aquila does nothing fast: It climbs slowly, and descends even slower. The solar-powered craft is extremely efficient, running on the power equivalent of three blow dryers. (Loaned photos)

Apache Scouts led Army to success in early Arizona

By Bill Heidner, Yuma Proving Ground Heritage Center Curator

Of the 20 Arizona recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor, the first 11 are Native Americans awarded the medal for their service during Arizona's "Apache Wars."

While conducting a study of the Apache Wars in the Arizona Territory, it is difficult to find much on which historians agree. One thing on which all agree, however, is that General George Crook's Apache Scouts were his most effective tool and responsible for much of the success and eventual end to the bloody and hard-fought Apache Wars in Arizona.

The nature of the warfare in the region was of a hit and run style. Bands of Apaches would attack when conditions benefitted them, and with the least risk. They would then leave with their spoils, usually livestock and weapons. If they were being pursued, they would split up and take many different paths, then link-up later. Native Americans were intimately familiar with the terrain and the area, something that could not be said of the Soldiers. They moved quickly, silently and could travel faster and farther than their pursuers. They could live off the land or go without, something else for which the frontier Army was ill-suited.

Crook began his tenure as Army commander in the Arizona Territory in 1871. He was a hands-on leader most comfortable in the field. To defeat an enemy, you must first find them, and for this critical task, Crook explicitly trusted his Native Scouts to do the job.

By the end of 1872, Crook began movement of his forces and active recruitment of his "Apache Scouts." Although this group of men are referred to as "Apache" Scouts, there were scouts from other tribes as well. Enlistment records are spotty at best, and in some cases are either non-existent or lost.

Of the 20 Arizona recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor, the first 11 are Native Americans awarded the medal for their service during Arizona's "Apache Wars." Although this group of men are referred to as "Apache" Scouts, there were scouts from other tribes as well. (Loaned photos)

The scouts were best used according to their own, and not the Army's, concept of scouting and tracking. For this reason, Crook selected younger, junior officers who were flexible in their outlooks and therefore more successful in leading this new type of Soldier. Leaders noted that honesty and trust were paramount values to be used with these men. It was stressed that the scouts "know best how to do their work."

While on the trail, scouts moved ahead of the soldiers looking for signs of the enemy. Additional groups of scouts would move along the flanks of the column. In theory, the group in front would track the enemy and once found, would bring the soldiers forward to conduct the attack. In practice, the scouts of the advance guard would often initiate and finish the fight before the main body could get up to their location.

After the wars had progressed for many years and were coming to a close, one chieftain told Crook that while they used to have no difficulty evading the Army, it had become nearly impossible. For this, Crook correctly gave credit to his scouts.

On March 12, 1875, the Congressional Medals of Honor were unofficially accredited to Arizona. Why "unofficially?" Because for seven of the scouts, either the enlistment information was lost or not completed, or the place of enlistment was not included in their citations. According to the rules of the medal, without a verifiable place of enlistment, the medal is not "officially" attributed to a state.

While on the trail, scouts moved ahead of the soldiers looking for signs of the enemy. Additional groups of scouts would move along the flanks of the column. The scouts of the advance guard often initiated and finished a fight before the main body could get up to their location.

Contemporary writers were quick to sing the praises of the Apache Scouts. While there remains much about the Apache Wars in Arizona to cause disagreement and debate, the effect of the "Apache Scouts" is undeniable. Arizona would not be the state it is today without their significant contributions.

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INDEPENDENCE DAY

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byeformer YPG commander Col. Robert Filbey (ret.), who served at the proving ground between 1996 and 2000. His first contact with the event came shortly after becoming YPG commander in late June 1996 and speaking at the ceremony only weeks later.

YPG Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Prosser (left) accepts the YPG Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year Award on behalf of Sgt. Kevin Storey from Yuma Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee Chairman Chuck LeDrew. "Yuma once again showed its commitment to supporting our men and women in the armed forces," Prosser said. (Photo by Mark Schauer)

He retired in Yuma at the conclusion of his Army career and has lived here ever since. "Once you get a little sand in your veins you can't leave," he said with a laugh.

Filbey considers the ceremony important because of its impact on younger generations.

In a way, this is 'paying it forward,'" he said. "By honoring our nation and flag, we teach the next generation what it's all about. I've seen increasing crowds attending this ceremony over the years and it is good to see."

YPG Soldier of the Year Sgt. Michael Jackson and NCO of the Year Sgt. Kevin Storey were presented plaques at the ceremony, as were personnel from Marine Corps Air Station Yuma.

"It was a fitting ceremony," commented Poppenberger. "This was a great day in a very patriotic town."

Independence Day typically concludes with spectacular, colorful fireworks displays that streak across the dark sky. In Yuma, the day is kicked-off with an upbeat early-morning flag-raising ceremony at Armed Forces Park. (Photo by Chuck Wullenjohn)